

E-administration as a way of increasing the managerial capacity in public sector

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E-ADMINISTRATION AS A WAY OF INCREASING THE MANAGERIAL CAPACITY IN PUBLIC SECTOR

1. Introductory notes

"It's so difficult to observe changes in the human nature. They are constantly happening. Still, when they do happen, we do not perceive them, and when we do, they are already history"
(Ralph Dahrendorf)

For the XIX century, "fin de siècle" meant cultural decadence, social alienation and elite's disappearance. One hundred years later, the same concept is equivalent to globalization and its consequences: "There will be no *there* anymore. We will all be *here*" (Waters, 1997: 62). Difference seen as unity, IT society, liberal pan-democratization - these are the basis of a construction that in 1900 was seen (as many are still seeing it) as a pure utopia - a society recognizing the same values and principles, a world where cooperation and humanism are omnipresent

For a democracy to be well preserved and promoted, the *sine qua non* condition to be achieved is that of recognizing the citizens' right to vote and to be voted for during election times. Still, though necessary, free elections are far from sufficient in ensuring a coherent democratic practice, for governance of and by the people should be a partnership – a partnership between citizens and elected officials, legitimized by the very mandate they hold. This partnership has to evolve in such way as to encourage the active citizenship, offering the possibility of expressing different interests, in different domains, by different people.

Often restrained by the local and central authorities lack of honesty and transparency, the citizen - public institutions partnership is, among others, conditioned by the public access to relevant and necessary information. Thus, the need for full and complete data, acknowledgement of legal rights and obligations, as well as efficient and rapid regulation and management of a substantial share of public affairs, is quite demanding at this stage, in the present Romanian democratic society.

A high rate of poverty, corruption, law infringements, unemployment and communicational dysfunctions – these are the basic internal problems of every country dealing with transition to real liberal democracy. Though hard to overcome, all these obstacles can be properly managed by promoting the need for active communication. As such, the organizational reinventing process applied to public sector structures, as a way of improving the overall performance of the government, becomes appropriated and politically desirable.

Thus, what used to be the proper way of handling instability and lack of economical balance is now considered an obstacle for "rediscovering" performance. Stimulating the traditional system (focused on efficient performance) using managerial methods that treasure results, encourage initiatives and stimulate creativity and competition is seen as the only organizational way of "escaping" the "conceptual prisons" (Plato) of the past.

So, if in the modern era (industrial era), the growth of an organization was seen a criterion for unquestionable success (the organization was large, stable and complex, therefore successful), the environment of the present structures is far away from stable.

Due to international competition, electronic trade and local decentralization¹, for example, the relation between the organizations and the surroundings is more and more difficult to estimate. Therefore, to face the present challenges, the organization has to switch to a newer paradigm, based not on affirmation and mechanical theories, but on the concept of a living, biological system². Following this trend, many organizations choose to become flexible and decentralized, to recognize once again the importance of horizontal collaboration and internal partnerships and to value information and knowledge instead of buildings and technological production. In this new environment, "the learning organizations" become essential for achieving overall performance, in both private and public sector.

Fully aware of the need for a revolution in the organizational culture of public administration and of a transition towards a horizontal, service-oriented administration with intensive information exchange among all its parts and with the outside, Romania has adopted the European vision on e-government and e-governance, preparing itself for a complete transformation that the new technologies both produce and permit.

In this context, "The Government's Strategy concerning the National Action Plan *e-administration*", enacted in October 2001 by the Romanian Parliament supports the idea of getting the governance closer to its citizens, according to the European Union present trend³.

Before analyzing Romanian's solutions for efficiently reforming the administrative system we will summarize the most relevant scientific contributions to defining the "*e-administration*" concept, underlining the implications this new, yet very well structured notion has for the (still) sovereignty-conditioned international actors (Rosenau, 1994).

2. Vectors of definition for the "*e-administration*" strategy

An elaborate discussion about *e-administration* should overcome the rigid, weberian-like thinking – focused on the *ideal-type* organization; one good reason for that is the very nature of *e-administration*, which supports the transformation process of the self-centered public structures into ones that value the citizen, his/her needs and direct participation into governing. Bearing this in mind, *e-administration* becomes a real condition for achieving the e-democracy targets, meaning, active citizenship and transparent decision-making processes.

2.1. E-government = *e-administration* + e-democracy

"S'il ne fallait retenir qu'une vertu des Technologies de l'information et de la Communication ce serait celui-ci: la possibilité d'offrir à chacun une tribune, un espace de liberté, d'expression" (André Santini)

¹ For comments on the consequences of globalization on organizational behavior, see also Waters (1997) and Modelski (2000).

² The French literature considers this new type of organization as a structure that combines team working and collective efforts to obtain a certain result with stimulating creativity and encouraging initiatives. See on this issue, Selles and Testa (1999: 14 - 28); Orgogozo and Sérieyx (1992:148 -176).

³ In February 2001, according to the EU regulations, the public services to be distributed to the citizens using the new technologies are: income taxes: declaration, notification of assessment, job search services by labour offices, social security contributions, personal documents (passport and driver's license), car registration (new, used and imported cars), application for building permission, declaration to the police, public libraries, certificates, enrolment in higher education/university, announcement of moving, health related services.

See for details: http://europa.eu.int/information_society/europe/action_plan/pdf/basicpublicservices.pdf

ITC represents one of the modern instruments that help into implementing democracy and developing current public services as well as educational systems. Within a general legal framework, the state should therefore ensure free, non-discriminatory and equal access to IT for all subjects that use or may use digital information.

Reinvented according to the European practices of IT society⁴, public administration is brought closer to citizens, while democracy itself evolves from being a “government of, by and for the people”, into one getting “closer to people”⁵.

A synthesis between *e-administration* and e-democracy, e-government represents the most adequate solution for solving the state’s authorities problems when managing t⁶he *res publica*, “under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population”.

Cheaper and more efficient than traditional ways of providing public services to both citizens and business environment, e-government promotes competition within the digital market, develops the social leading structures and encourages both investments and public acquisitions in the IT field.

It also comprises four main beneficiaries of the services provided by the public agencies:

- Citizens — G2C applications (license renewals, benefits status, taxes)
- Businesses — G2B applications (permits, payments and filings)
- Employees — G2E applications (personnel systems and intranets)
- Other agencies — G2G applications for reporting and funds transfer.

Part of the G2C component, *e-administration* provides a direct and continuous access to public services, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They are at least five major ways of communication between provider and user in the public sector; and all five of them are related to what the reinvented administration is all about:

1. Interrelation between citizens (seen as the User) and government (considered the Provider/Supplier)
2. Trade mutuality between citizen and government
3. Organizational co-operation and internal cohesion in the government agencies
4. Continuous flow of information between back office and front office
5. Focus on action and strategy making, for efficient run of public services.

⁴ In view of Council of the European Union, “*eEurope 2002 – an Informational Society for All*” Action Plan (Comission Of the European Communities, Bruxelles, 14.06.2000), the IT society stands as a new phase in the human development process; it proposes online access to government and Commission services, fast-track procedures to set up a company and wider use of electronic signatures and open source software.

⁵ *E –democracy* becomes then an unitarian and coherent way of putting into practice the European principle of subsidiarity, as it is understood in the *European Charter of Local Self-Government* (article 4.3): “Public responsibilities shall generally be exercised, in preference, by those authorities which are closest to the citizen. Allocation of responsibility to another authority should weigh up the extent and nature of the task and requirements of efficiency and economy”. See for full text: <http://www.coe.fr/cplre/demlr/eng/etxt/treaties.htm>

⁶ This formula is actually the very heart of the local self-government principle, enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

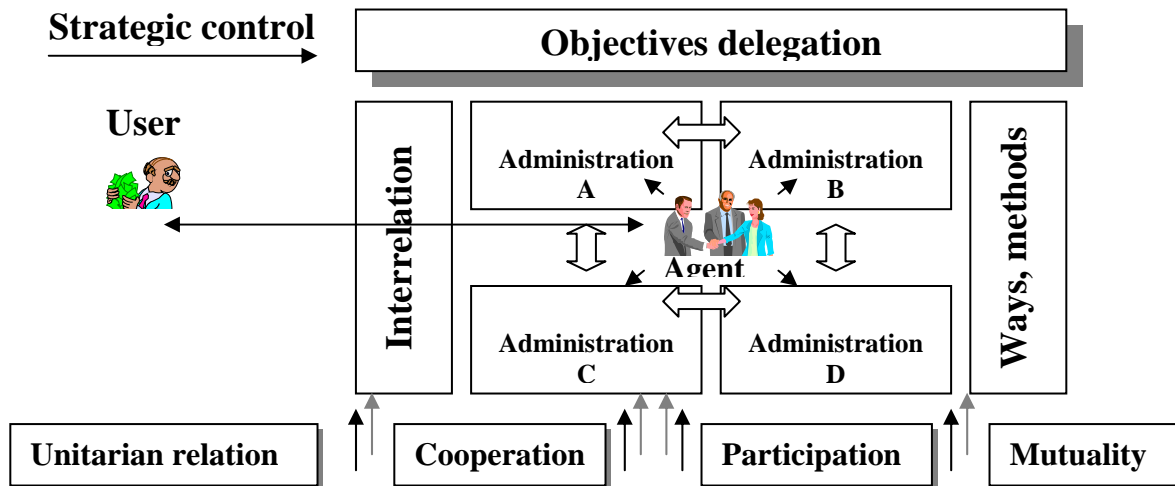


Figure 1
Main ways of communication provided by *E-administration*

In the government system, the general concern's variety is directly linked to the level of social complexity: as such, if the public demands grow higher, the government will definitely feel stimulated as it is, *lato sensu*, the most important processor of citizens requests (Decleris: 149)⁷. The debate on how specific the administration actions should be get, tends to be rather common these days, for "it is not surprising anymore that public administration has its own emergent organizational qualities, through which it seeks and tries to achieve the public interest"⁸.

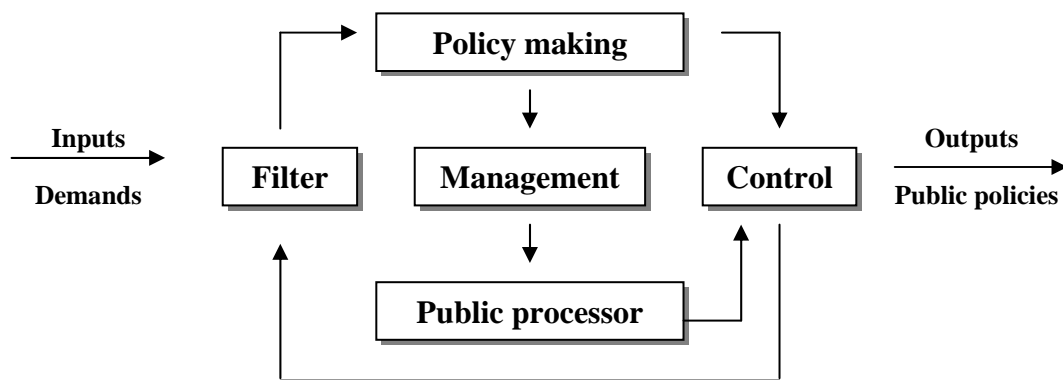


Figure 2
A systemic model of Public Administration (Decleris, 1992: 150)

Often stigmatized and usually depreciatory used, the concept of bureaucracy has a three dimension meaning, since it defines not only an organizational structure (Thompson, 1961: 3-4; Heady, 2001: 72; Hall, 1962: 295-308) and a behavior (Friedrich, 1963: 471; Merton, 1949), but also an institutional

⁷ For comments, see also Matei (2000: 108 et seq.)

⁸ On public interest issue, see also, Lane (2002: 7 et seq.)

method created exclusively so as to maximize efficiency by properly “educating” the actors performing in a certain environment. Nevertheless, Weber has supported the idea of bureaucracy seen as a dehumanizing form of organization, legal and very strict, yet efficient, strong and expansive. An ideal-type and a reaction towards the archaism of past societies too, bureaucracy seems to be the right model to be applied to governmental agencies. Yet, “it’s rather unpleasant the thought of a world ruled only by bureaucrats, insignificant clerks in minor positions, striving to get attention [...] How can we escape this entire machinery – like organization?”⁹

The answer to this question lays at the very dawn of the new IT society and it is represented by *e-administration*; its major consequence is the public sector’s improvement by using managerial practices “borrowed” from the private sector. As such, to increase the administration’s efficiency is to use in the governmental bureaucratic-type structures, both new management methods and IT technologies (Gruber, 1987: 69).

2.2. New public management

Lato sensu, management means strategy-base thinking and ruling focused on achieving (according to the *minimax* criterion) the desirable ends (Newman, 1964: 1). Nowadays, in view of continuous development of public incentives and taking into account the need for competition, the governmental sector management has become an alternative to the bureaucratic way of organization (Mackenzie, 1991: 92-99). Generally speaking, management operates with principle of economic efficiency. Yet, for *e-administration* this basic criterion is slightly altered since management implementation finally focuses on achieving political concordance; the same goes for the case of strategic management, since in a state environment, the most important values are the one generated by the political process, instead of the economic activities. In light of this, public management should be all about improving the quality of the services provided by the government to the citizens, diminishing the organizational rigidity and reducing bureaucracy by adjusting the flow of information in and out the public bodies (Matei, 2001: 69).

Similar to the hobbesian leviathan, the public administration system has reached the point when transformation is inevitable and the managerial private practices are finally appreciated.

From a world where the rule used to be *stability* and the exception, *change*, organizations have evolved into a phase where working “en réseau” (Selles and Testa, 1999: 27) is treasured, while pyramidal structures, passive and incapable of transforming their agents into actors (Orgogozo and Sérieyx, 1992: 148-160) are considered decadent. This phase is the one represented by e-institutions.

⁹ Max Weber, quoted in Bendix (1962: 464)

| Criterion | Neotaylorian organisation | Formal Organisation | Reinvented Organisation |
|--|---|--|---|
| Organisational profile | Pyramidal High degree of stratification | Matrix based Pyramidal structure, transparent | Net base organisation, low degree of hierarchy |
| Power | Vertical Top concentrated | Top concentrated Few local power centers | Transversal Difuse |
| Values | Subordination | Conformism | Development |
| Evaluation of individual performance | Job task | Competence | Initiative |
| Control | Direct | Delegated | Autoregulation (client / provider) |
| Information flow | Official information: up – down | Multiple information system, low-level efficiency | Multilateral information |
| Work environment | Impersonal | Opressive | Friendly atmosphere |
| Conflict | Anomaly | Source for legitimacy | Source for innovation |

Table 1
Models of public organizations (Selles and Testa, 1999)

Due to the increase number of organizational transformations that hold as main agent the public management manner, *e-administration* becomes a mission-centered administration that treasure the citizen as well as the idea of a competitive public sector.

2.3. E-transformation

For an e-strategy to be coherently formulated and applied in the government's areas of interest, a complex analysis of all the methods to be "borrowed" from the private sector and implemented in the public one should be provided. There are, for example, several dimensions than represent the very basis of a *scorecard strategy* (Norton and Kaplan, 1996):

1. *Financial dimension* – it represents the very end of the „Strategy Charter” and it may appear to some extent insufficiently adapted to the needs of the public IT society.
2. *Client dimension* – that helps delivering the services to the public.
3. *Internal process dimension* – which focuses on identifying the ways of improving the administrative capacity of managing the demand for public services.
4. *Organizational dimension* – it becomes relevant when trying to establish the strategic changes that the government deals with.

There are at least seven steps to take in order to experience a full e-transformation:

1. *Rapidity*: change involves flexibility. In the *e-administration*'s particular case, public organizations should therefore keep an open mind perception on the external environment inputs and try to react in due time to the relevant stimuli.
2. *Citizens oriented strategy*: the citizen should become an actor of the administrative system. As such, *e-administration* has to consider him/her not only as a voter, but also as a client, a public services user. Decreasing bureaucracy by using specific IT methods would be regarded as the best solution for developing the citizen- administration partnership.
3. *Innovation*: it implies the very nature of e-transformation: the former rigid and technical administrative machinery is now being transformed into an organic, "réseau"-like organization.
4. *Transversal management*: the new technologies assure a consistent flow of data in and out the public institutions subject to change. Therefore, IT will assist the dialogue between the government's agencies and the civil society, thus creating the very basis of a coherent public efficiency increase.
5. *Behaviour adjustments*: "les fonctionnaires doivent devenir auteurs – acteurs, responsables, capables d'initiatives à établir des relations transversales avec les services partenaires, à s'ouvrir sur l'extérieur et d'abord à l'écoute du public" (Sérieyx, 1993: 144).
6. *Integration and development of IT systems*: *E-administration* doesn't primary and exclusively focus on change; it rather tries to improve the public services quality, develop the e-management procedures and accomplish a competitive public environment.

To summarize, why should public administration go through an e-transformation? In short, because¹⁰:

- *Maximum rapidity in solving the citizens' requests will be achieved*, contributing in the same time to bureaucracy reduction.
- *Smaller expenditures from the perspective of the public institutions will become a reality*.
- *Saving money and time, from the citizen's perspective will also become possible*; by a permanent access at the information offered by the public administration.
- *Accessibility* will increase, since the connection to the on-line services will become possible by using only a computer, a modem, a telephone line, an Internet connection (from an Internet Service Provider) and navigation software.
- *Security/safety and confidentiality* for the on-line operations will be insured through special encrypting software.

E-administration is therefore one of the fundamental pillars of an efficient governance, thus promoting the European values of the IT society. Thus to reform the public administration in such a way to achieve an *e-administration* that runs efficiently represents the main interest of the Romanian Government Action Plan, to be presented in the next section.

3. Romanian strategy for transforming the public administration into an *e-administration*

In 2002, The Urban and Regional Research Center (CURS) has developed a study on the Romanian society's present needs and resources¹¹ where it pointed out that after 12 years of post communist transition, almost half of the Romanian urban population sees as weak and very weak its relation with the public authorities.

¹⁰ See also, Filip and Stoica: <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/untc/unpan003858.pdf>

¹¹ CURS – SA, Contract RO.004.02.01/C1.

source: http://www.fdsc.ro/PDF/BCC-%20Evaluarea%20nevoilor%20si%20resurselor%20existente_Studiu%202002.pdf

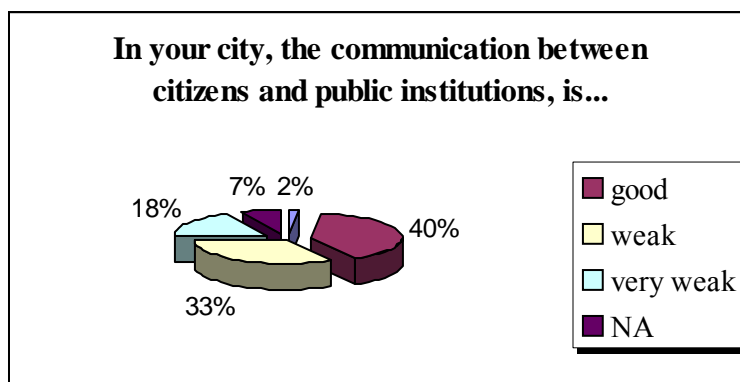


Chart 1

The level of communication between citizens and public institutions (CURS, 2002)

Among the most important causes of this conclusion, in view of the same research analysis, one can include: high level of bureaucracy (48% of the respondents), public corruption (25%), lack of institutional transparency (9% of the respondents) and instability of the legal system (8%).

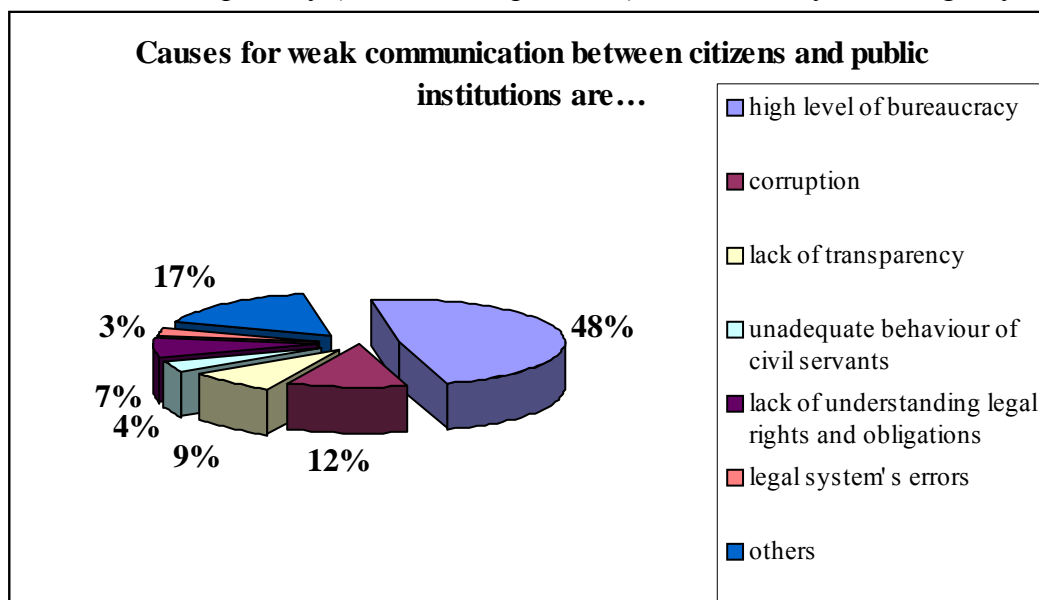


Chart 2

Causes for weak communication between citizen and public institutions (CURS, 2002)

The representatives of the public sector, on the other hand, consider that the low rate of access to shared information as well as the lack of transparency in decision making process are the key factors for a not so active partnership between citizens and government authorities. On the issue “how to improve the communication in the public sector area” CURS suggests, based on respondents reaction, that first it would be better to “reduce the number of intermediary agents” (96.3% of the respondents) and to “create informational bureaus” by using IT solutions (92.7%). When 90.3% of the questioned citizens confirmed that in order to get their problems solved they go at least two times to the competent authority headquarters, thus wasting time and energy¹², an IT solution is unquestionable useful.

¹² The main reasons for this are: complexity of the action (50% of the cases), lack of previous information (23%), long waiting periods (5%) and delays caused by the bureaucratic behaviour of the public institutions (14%).

3.1. Government's Strategy concerning the acceleration of public administration reform

In October 2001, the Romanian Parliament has enacted the "Government's Strategy concerning the acceleration of public administration reform" (HG 1006/2001)¹³, where it stated as main principles for the proposed restructuring:

- the political and administrative functions separation principle
- the principle of creating and consolidating professional and politically neutral civil servants
- the principle of clearly defining the role, responsibilities and the relationship between institutions
- the subsidiarity principle so that decisions to be taken by and in the citizen's interest
- the principle of decision-making autonomy
- the principle of simplifying procedures and normative acts
- the transparency of the administrative and governance actions
- the respect for the citizen principle
- the principle of channeling the interest for results in terms of efficiency, efficacy and the quality of services.

All these principles require both modern methods of public management as well as new forms of institutional organizations –one provided by *e-administration*. Reinventing the public sector would therefore imply a profound restructuring of the central and local public structures, a substantial change of the relationship between the administration and the citizen and also a decentralizing process, with regard to financial as well as political matters.

After VanSant (1997), good governance – figure 3 - is mostly about legitimacy – citizens must accept the authority of those in power, the existence of a sectioned set of rules, processes and procedures; still, it is correlated also to some very important issues that fundamentally represent the main body of the *e-administration*:

- *Accountability*: assured by the transparent processes for selecting power holders and the procedures by which their decisions and the results they produce are held up to public scrutiny and feedback.
- *Management effectiveness*: it concerns the ability of public bureaucracies to skillfully and efficiently transform public resources into services and infrastructure that corresponds to publicly determined priorities.
- *Responsiveness*: the degree to which government responds to citizens' needs and articulated demands
- *Availability of information*: information permits the public to judge the effectiveness of those in power and to participate in the decision-making process

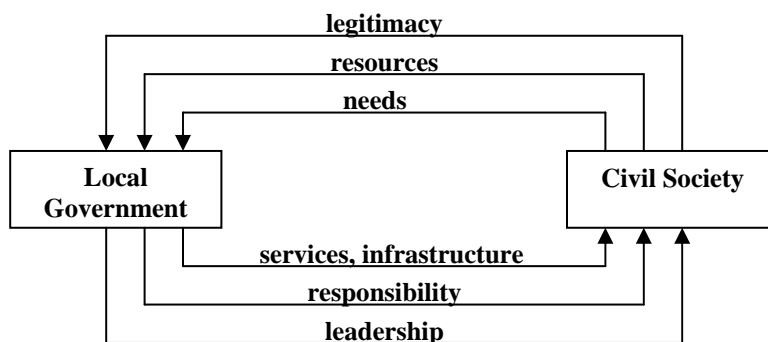


Figure 3
Building good governance (VanSant, 1997)

¹³ Source: <http://www.gov.ro/engleza/index.html>

A good governance example is the one offered by the “Government’s Strategy concerning the National Action Plan – *e-administration*”¹⁴, which comprises the following courses of action:

1. Computerization designed to enhance operational efficiency within the central and local public administration organisms;
2. Computerization of services to citizens and firms, often implying integration among the services of central and local public administration
3. Provision of ITC access to final users of central public administration services and information.

E-administration National Action Plan stresses actions of second and third types, which are those with direct impact and visibility for users; it proposes to involve all central and local administrations and all institutions of the country: counties, municipalities, towns, schools, hospitals and so on – in practice every agency or organization that performs some function of providing public services to citizens or businesses.

Singling local authorities out as the prime actors in intermediation among citizens, businesses and the central administration is exclusively, a political choice. The correct architectural design of a national information system will not preclude the possibility that others, who do not form part of the Administration, can play essential role of intermediation with value added. Every central or local government unit will thus be called upon to carry out planning actions which, taken all together, must result in an overall modernization of the government administration, overcoming the sectorial vision restricted to the performance of one’s own institutional tasks and the provision of one’s own services. These actions will be coordinated and funded as part of a single program and managed with full respect for local autonomy, but with the commitment on the part of all administrative units to pursue shared purposes, using appropriate, innovative instruments, both organizational and operational.

The vision of the Administration that we offer to the nation, and which can be realized in practice thanks to the possibilities that IT now offers, can be summarized in the following propositions:

- Citizens can receive every public service to which they are entitled by applying to any authorized front-office authority.
- After being identified, the front-office information system must be capable of securing, directly from every agency or department that has it, all the information needed to authorize the performance of the services requested
- Citizens can request a service exclusively on the basis of their own needs, not the knowledge of which agency does what
- Citizens must be able to notify the Administration once only. The administration shall maintain a file on every citizen permitting it to notify the change to all the departments and agencies affected and to activate the adequate services.

The formulation of the Action Plan flows from the above-cited vision; therefore, its implementation necessitates some pre-conditions, most importantly:

- All departments and agencies must be equipped with an information system designed not just for the automation of internal functions and procedures and the performance of services for its users but also for the provision of services directly to the information systems of other government units.

¹⁴ HG 1007/4 October 2001.

- A network of equal users must interlink the information systems of all government units, without any hierarchy reflecting institutional or organizational superstructures
- All administrations performing a back-office role shall make their services accessible, without charge, online, to all the government units that perform a front-desk role
- Front-office administrations must achieve the integration of back-office administrations' services in order to provide full service according to citizens' needs
- The identification of the person requesting the service and the verification of the relevant authorizations must be effected by a uniform procedure throughout the national territory. To this end, the electronic ID card will be made the preferred tool of access to all public services.

The provision of integrated services by several different government units implies the achievement of full interoperability of the information systems of central with those of local government, which are increasingly assigned to the direct management of services to citizens and businesses and which will thus be front-office of the country's public administration.

The formulation and implementation of the Action Plan for *e-administration* necessitates organizational actions to guarantee the feasibility of the projects. Specifically, recourse will be had to the Authority for Computerization of Public Administration, which works in its own sphere of competence, and two bodies, specially created: a unit to formulate the strategy for the computerization of government administration and a unit for program management.

The Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) also created a Special Unit for Reforming the Public Administration, whose main objective is to manage the e-transformation process, in view of the internal and external communication strategies and the Action Plan just cited.

According to the latter, the public administration's actions will lead to making connection for all its departments and agencies within the second half of 2003. The national network will, thus be created by two coordinated actions: one to realize interoperability among the existing regional networks and the single central administration network and a second to create a virtual extranet covering the entire national territory for areas not yet covered by other local initiatives.

The portals are also proposed as the way to make accessible, especially in conjunction with value added services, such instruments as digital signatures and the electronic ID card. The Strategy talks about: *information portals*: e.g., legal portals, that facilitate and unify access to the regulatory, legal and judicial documentation already available on the countless institutional web sites; *service portals*: the Action Plan aims for the creation of a portal for services to citizens, one for services to business, a specialized portal for employment services and one for certification.

The accomplishment of the administrative reform is directly linked to the strengthening of the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Public Administration. The Twinning Convention financed by PHARE RO-0106.01 – "Strengthening the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Public Administration" offered a great deal of support to this end.

4. Conclusions

Public administration, *per se*, as a component of the public sector tends to become synonymous to the public services, delivered to the citizen. Thus, to create and develop a coherent strategy in the communicational and information domain represents the *sine qua non* condition for achieving the above stated objective.

The European experience, as well as the doctrine relevant to this particular issue synthesizes the managerial methodologies that offer an overview on the public sector decisions.

At present, the "re-engineering" process of every single entity at the level of its organizational and executive structures on the basis of the new informational and communicational technologies (ICTs) represents the main concern for the public sector organizations. Thus, in the view of public management and at organizational level, ICT becomes the most important "informative quantity" of the daily flow of information process, thanks to its instruments that allow coping with changes and improving the public services' quality. In this context, the "*e-administration*" can be seen as one of the fundamental pillars of an efficient administration that favors through its direct means the overall performance of the public sector.

From policy to management, from pyramidal structures to réseau-like public structures and finally from controlling to planning, the new public management actually tries to change the traditional way of organizational thinking.

Therefore e-transformation converges into *e-administration* and finally leads to e-government and e-democracy. In this context, Romania tries to become part of the European modernization process; to this end, the Government's Action Plan successfully puts into practice the contemporaries theories directly linked to the IT domain.

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